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ABSTRACT

The Humanities Project was a 2-year collaboration between the Austin Independent School District (Texas) and the University of Texas at Austin. The primary goals of the project were, first, to provide selected teachers with an opportunity for intensive study in selected works of world literature, and second, to help teachers with the development of ways to apply those works to their classroom teaching. Summer course work at Texas University was followed by activities during the school year to promote both goals. This report presents findings on the evaluation of the program and the responses of participants regarding their satisfaction with the program and the ways in which their participation improved their teaching. (JD)

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Improving Humanities Education

Final Report

1988-89

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Austin Independent School District

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IMPROVING HUMANITIES EDUCATION

FINAL REPORT 1988-89
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUTHOR: Paul A. Schutz

Program Description

The Humanities Project was a two-year collaboration between the Austin Independent School District and The University of Texas at Austin. The primary goals of the project were first, to provide selected teachers with an opportunity for intensive study in selected works of world literature, and second, to help teachers with the development of ways to apply those works to their classroom teaching. Summer course work at UT was followed by activities during the school year to promote both these goals.

Major Findings

1. Project evaluation records indicate that the stated goals of the Humanities Project are being met at present, and improvements in the teaching of the humanities could continue into the future as a result of this project.

2. The participants of the 1988 summer seminar expressed high to very high levels of satisfaction with their experience in the seminar and the follow-up activities.

3. Most (85%) of the participants of the 1988 summer seminar indicated that they had used the information and/or ideas from the seminar during the 1988-89 school year.

4. Participants reported that their experience in the Humanities Project has improved their ability to teach the topics of the 1988 seminar by an average of 54%.

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WHAT WAS THE HUMANITIES PROJECT?

The Humanities Project was a two-year collaboration between the Austin Independent School District and The University of Texas at Austin. The project and evaluation were funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), The University of Texas at Austin (UT), and the Austin Independent School District (AISD). The total budgeted cost of the project for the two-year period was $269,177. The NEH grant accounted for 60% of that total, UT provided 23%, and AISD provided 17% of the project's cost. The project was designed for both current and prospective teachers of world literature in the general and honors English programs of the District's high schools and middle/junior high schools. However, other teachers from areas such as art, social studies, and foreign language were included in the project.

The Humanities Project consisted of two summer seminars in 1987 and 1988 and school year follow-up activities during the 1987-88 and 1988-89 school years. There were two principal aims that applied both to the planned summer seminar and the follow-up activities. The first was to provide teachers with the opportunity to develop a sound background in some of the principal works of world literature. The second was to help teachers apply those works of literature to their classroom teaching.

This final report is an evaluation of the follow-up activities to the 1988 summer seminar that occurred during the 1988-89 school year and will include a discussion of the overall Humanities Project.

Information gathered for this final report originated from the 1987 and 1988 Humanities Project interim reports, the AISD spring 1988 Employee Survey, and informal interviews with AISD's Project Director and Secondary Instructional Coordinator, and The University of Texas Project Director.

WHAT WERE THE FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES TO THE 1988 SEMINAR?

The follow-up activities to the 1988 summer seminar involved the following: classroom visits from the University staff, group meetings to share information, reports on progress, and revisions to curriculum materials.

Three group information-sharing meetings were held during the 1988-89 school year (October 22, 1988, December 3, 1988, and March 22, 1989). These meetings involved progress reports, information sharing by participants, and curriculum revisions. In the October meeting, teacher-participants met to discuss the usefulness of the new knowledge and any problems that the teachers were having implementing the information and/or ideas. Of the 41 participants to the 1988 summer seminar, approximately 33 (80%) participated in this meeting.

The December meeting involved discussions about the experiences the teachers had with the successful as well as unsuccessful application of the information and/or ideas from the 1988 seminar to their classroom teaching. Of the 41 participants to the 1988 summer seminar, about 15 (37%) participated.

The March meeting focused on collecting information and suggestions for the three concurrent one-week curricular workshops that were being planned for June 5-9 1989. These workshops were possible through use of remaining grant funds (see ORE Publication Number 87.59 for discussion of unused grant funds). The stated purposes of the curricular workshops were to prepare curricular and other resource materials which would be used in AISD. Approximately 30 (73%) participants attended this meeting.

There were also visits by University staff with approximately 37 (or 90%) of the participants to the 1988 summer seminar. According to the project coordinators, the focus of these visits was to help in the adaptations of the 1988 seminar content to the classroom and to help with any problems or questions that the participants had about the teaching of the topics of the 1988 summer seminar. These visits were available to any teacher who expressed an interest in participating.

In addition to the group meetings and classroom visits, a participating professor conducted bimonthly voluntary small group meetings (4-10 teachers) to discuss medieval literature and culture. These meetings were also attended by some teachers who were not part of the Humanities Project. This would indicate that the information and ideas from the Humanities Project are also reaching teachers beyond the participants of the seminars.

<u>Did participants to the 1988 seminar apply what they learned?</u>

As part of AISD's spring, 1989, Employee Survey, participants of the 1988 Summer Seminar were asked how often they had applied specific ideas and/or information from the seminar and the follow-up activities for that seminar in their classrooms (see Figure 1). Responses by participants, who stated that the

topics of the 1988 seminar were part of their curriculum (i.e., those who responded with letters A through F, see Figure 1) indicated that 42.8% used ideas and/or information from the seminar on a daily or weekly basis. An additional 25.7% of the participants responded that they had used the ideas and/or information at least once a month. Overall, 84.6% of the participants indicated that they had used the information and/or ideas from the seminar at least once over the course of the school year; 15.4% indicated that they had not used the ideas and/or information (5.1%) or that the topics of the 1988 seminar were not part of their 1988-89 curriculum (10.3%).

FIGURE 1
PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES TO HOW OFTEN THEY APPLIED SPECIFIC IDEAS AND/OR INFORMATION FROM THE 1988 SUMMER SEMINAR DURING THE 1988-89 SCHOOL YEAR

A = Daily
B = Weekly
C = Monthly
D = A few times
E = Once
F = Never
G = The topics of the 1988 Summer Seminar were not part of my 1988-89 curriculum

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	
High School	20.0%	23.3%	20.0%	26.7%	0.0%	3.3%	6.7%	N=30
Middle/Junior	0.0%	22.2%	33.3%	0.0%	11.1%	11.1%	22.2%	N= 9
Totals	15.4%	23.1%	23.1%	20.5%	2.6%	5.1%	10.3%	N=39

How did participation in the 1988 seminar affect the way the participants taught the topics of that seminar?

As part of AISD's spring, 1989, Employee Survey, participants were asked how their experiences in the 1988 summer seminar and follow-up activities affected the way they taught the topics of the seminar (see Figure 2). Responses were generally quite positive as 37.5% of the teachers felt that the experience had changed the way they taught the topics of the 1988 seminar "very much" with an additional 32.5% stating that the experience had "somewhat" changed their approach. Much smaller percentages, 17.5% of the participants indicated that they thought their experience had not changed the way they taught the topics (2.5%) or that the topics of the 1988 seminar were not part of their 1988-89 curriculum (15.0%).

FIGURE 2
THE EXTENT TO WHICH PARTICIPANTS STATED THAT THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN THE HUMANITIES PROJECT CHANGED THE WAY THEY TAUGHT THE TOPICS OF THE 1988 SEMINAR

A = Very much
B = Somewhat
C = A little
D = Not at all
E = The topics of the 1988 Summer Seminar were not part of my 1988-89 curriculum

	A	B	C	D	E	
High School	43.3%	33.3%	13.3%	0.0%	10.0%	N=30
Middle/Junior High	20.0%	30.0%	10.0%	10.0%	30.0%	N=10
Totals	37.5%	32.5%	12.5%	2.5%	15.0%	N=40

Participants were asked the extent to which the quality of the methods they used for teaching the topics of the seminar had improved as a result of their participation in that seminar (see Figure 3). Few (2.4%) said that the experience had no effect on their teaching of the 1988 seminar topics. The average amount of expressed improvement in the methods used to teach the topics of the 1988 seminar was 54.4% (excluding participants who indicated that the topics of the seminar were not part of their 1988-89). Thus, the participants were quite positive about the perceived effect of their humanities experience.

FIGURE 3
PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTION OF THE PERCENT OF IMPROVEMENT IN THE QUALITY OF THE METHOD USED TO TEACH THE TOPICS OF THE 1988 SEMINAR AS COMPARED TO BEFORE THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE SEMINAR

	*	0%	10/20%	30/40%	50/60%	70/80%	90/100%	
High school	9.7	3.2	12.9	16.1	29.0	06.5	22.5	N=31
Middle/Jr.	60.0	0.0	10.0	10.0	0.0	10.0	10.0	N=10
Totals	22.2	2.4	12.2	14.6	22.0	7.3	19.5	N=41

* The topics of the 1988 Summer Seminar were not part of the participants' 1988-89 curriculum.

In addition, the participants were asked what effect their experience in the program had on the overall quality of their teaching (See Figure 4). The average amount of improvement in the overall quality of their teaching was 44.9%, and only 5.4%, or two participants, indicated that the experience had not improved their teaching. Again, this indicated that the participants were quite positive about their humanities experience.

FIGURE 4
PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTION OF THE PERCENT OF IMPROVEMENT IN THE OVERALL QUALITY OF THEIR TEACHING AS COMPARED TO BEFORE THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE SEMINAR

	0%	10/20%	30/40%	50/60%	70/80%	90/100%	
High school	3.6	25.0	21.4	14.3	10.7	25.0	N=28
Middle/Jr.	11.1	55.0	11.1	11.1	0.0	11.1	N= 9
Totals	5.4	32.4	18.9	13.5	8.1	21.6	N=37

How satisfied were the participants with the 1988 seminar and the follow-up activities to the 1988 seminar?

On AISD's spring, 1989, Employee Survey, participants were also asked to rate their overall levels of satisfaction with the summer seminar and follow-up activities. The mean rating for the participants who responded to the question was 4.32 on a five-point scale with 1 representing a very low level of satisfaction and 5 a very high level of satisfaction. Overall, 56.8% responded with the "very high" rating and an additional 29.7% with the "high" rating. For this question only 2.7% or one participant answered with a "very low" rating (see Figure 5). This indicates that the participants generally expressed a high to very high level of satisfaction with their humanities experience.

FIGURE 5
PARTICIPANTS' EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH
THE HUMANITIES PROJECT

A = Very low
B = Low
C = Moderate
D = High
E = Very high

	A	B	C	D	E	
High School	0.0%	6.9%	6.9%	27.6%	58.6%	N=29
Middle/Junior High	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%	37.5%	50.0%	N= 8
Totals	2.7%	5.4%	5.4%	29.7%	56.8%	N=37

WERE THE ACTIVITIES OUTLINED IN THE GRANT IMPLEMENTED AS PLANNED?

In the project description for the Humanities Project, there were two categories of activities outlined: first, two seminars to be held during the summer of 1987 and the summer of 1988; and second, follow-up activities to the summer seminars during the 1987-88 school year and the 1988-89 school year.

In terms of the summer institutes, the project description is very explicit in discussing not only when the seminars are to take place, but also, what is to be discussed, by whom, and what format is to be used. The project evaluation records show that, for the most part, what was discussed in the program description was also what took place during the summer seminars. The only variation from the program descriptions was in the selection of participants for the seminars (see ORE Publication Number 86.62).

In terms of the follow-up activities, the project description is less explicit, but indicates that basically two types of follow-up activities were to take place: first, four group meetings (each school year of the project) that involved summer seminar participants and UT facility, and second, classroom visits by participating UT facility to all teacher-participants.

From information gathered from AISD's Secondary Coordinator and the UT Project Director, during the 1987-88 school year three group meetings were held with approximately 79%, 56%, and 79% of the participants attending. In addition, approximately

54% of the participants received visits by University staff (see ORE Publication Number 86.62). For the follow-up activities during the 1988-89 school year again three group meetings were held with approximately 80%, 37% and 73% of the participants attending. In addition, approximately 90% of the participants received classroom visits. Thus the types of activities listed were completed. However, one fewer meeting per year occurred than was planned with most teachers participating. Visits to the classrooms also occurred, although everyone was not visited each year (almost all were visited in 1988-89 but not 1987-88).

Were the overall goals for the Humanities Project attained?

The primary goals of the Humanities Project were first, to provide selected teachers with the opportunity for intensive study in selected works of world literature, and second, to help those teachers with the development of ways to apply those topics to their classroom teaching. In terms of the opportunity for intensive study in selected works of world literature, project evaluation records indicate that not only was the opportunity available but the participants also expressed high to very high levels of satisfaction with their summer seminar experience (see ORE Publication Numbers 86.62 and 87.59).

In terms of the development of ways of applying the topics to their classroom project, evaluation records also indicate that the information and ideas from the summer seminars are being used and that their use is perceived to be substantially improving the way the topics are being taught. In addition, the curricular workshops that took place on June 5-9, 1989 should be helpful to not only the participants of the two Summer Seminar but also to other interested teachers in the school district. Therefore, project evaluation information indicates that the stated goals of the project are being met at present and the improvements in the District's humanities education could continue into the future as a result of this project.

What aspects of the Humanities Project provide a viable model for school district-university cooperation?

According to project staff, the most important contribution that this project has made to enhance District-University cooperation is in the continued development of the lines of communication between the District and the University. This improved communication has resulted in the opportunity for AISD teachers to be able to use University resources and to meet and work with University professors to broaden their own knowledge and therefore enrich their teaching of the Humanities. With

the continued development of this relationship, the teachers involved know where to go and with whom to talk to in the future about any problems or ideas they may have.

This project may also bring teachers within the District closer together. They have shared an enriching experience and in the process have developed important lines of communication with their peers in the District. Teachers now have the opportunity to develop relationships that could facilitate development of unique and original ideas for humanities education.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Results from the evaluations of the Humanities Project indicate that the teachers who participated in the project had high levels of satisfaction with both their summer seminar and follow-up activities' experience. Evaluation results also indicate that information and ideas developed during the teachers' experience are being used in the classrooms of the participants as well as other AISD teachers. In addition, the project has served as a foundation for the development of lines of communication in the humanities between UT and AISD. These lines of communication, the high level of satisfaction, and the use of the information and ideas from the project in participants' and other teachers' classrooms, confirm that, for the most part, the stated goals of the Humanities Project are being attained.

With the goals of the project being met, it is important at this time to focus on two areas:

- o First, what can be done to continue the interest and momentum that has been developed in humanities education as a result of this project?

- o Second, what has been learned from this project that could be applied to similar projects in the future?

The following suggestions address these two areas:

1) Teachers participating in the project and in the curriculum workshops could be involved in the dissemination of ideas, information, and materials to other interested teachers. Procedures could be designed to facilitate developing teacher awareness of the ideas, information, and material that have been developed, and formal or informal workshops to discuss ways to use the ideas and materials. One set of materials should be

available in each school. Teachers involved in the project could be the key to seeing that they are used productively.

2) There were two aspects of the program that were not implemented as stated in the project description; first, the selection of participants to the program who were not from the target population, and second, the completeness of the follow-up activities to the summer seminar.

- o Future grants of this nature might take care in their development to define the target groups more broadly and gear project activities more towards participant needs. As this project progressed it evolved to include those teachers who participated but were not originally envisioned for the project; those participants were pleased with their experience. Thus, future grant writers may want to discuss that aspect of the grant with the project staff from this grant.

- o As stated earlier, the program description for the follow-up activities was not very explicit in terms of what was to take place, when it was to take place, and what was to be the outcome of those activities. Future grants of this nature may want to develop more explicitly discussion of the follow-up activities.

  Future grants may also want to include the curriculum workshops (similar to the one that was held from June 5-9, 1989) in the original grant. This would appear to be a very useful way to facilitate the dissemination of the ideas, information, and materials developed during the project.

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